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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001609

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SUBJECT: FINAL MEETING WITH ISRAELI TRADE REP

Classified By: Scott McGehee, CDA for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Dov Segev-Steinberg, Israeli trade representative, shared his views on a range of issues with Poloff in a final meeting before his departure from Qatar the last week of September. While the trade representative did not foresee any change in Qatar-Israeli relations and the current low profile status of his office in Qatar, he was encouraged by the words of Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani, First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, to the Israeli Foreign Minister on the sidelines of the recent UNGA meeting. Segev-Steinberg also speculated that the Emir's daughter with Sheikha Mozah is being groomed to replace the current Foreign Minister. End Summary.

Backstage at UNGA

2. (C) Israeli Trade Representative Dov Segev-Steinberg expressed muted optimism on the prospects for improved Qatari-Israeli relations. Segev-Steinberg cited the comments of Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani at a meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom on the sidelines of the UNGA meeting. During the meeting the Qatari Foreign Minister praised the Israeli pull-out from Gaza and said that Qatar would consider opening diplomatic ties with Israel ahead of the establishment of a Palestinian State. However, the Qatari Foreign Minister stated that the Gaza pull-out was only a first step and that Israel had to continue with the West Bank. The Qatari Foreign Minister also stated that Arab countries should respond to the Israeli withdrawal by talking with Israel.

3. (C) Segev-Steinberg also touched upon the Qatari Foreign Minister's 14 September speech at the Council of Foreign Relations in which Al Thani called on the Arab countries to "make a step" toward Israel through an international meeting between the Arab States, Israel and the United States. Segev-Steinberg noted that Qatar is the only Arab country that has publicly supported the Israeli pull-out of Gaza and pushed for engaging with Israel. Qatar has been keen to play an increased role in mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict. He viewed these comments as positive and indicative of Qatar's efforts in that regard. When asked whether the speech would change the current status of the Israeli Trade mission in Qatar, Segev-Steinberg was more pragmatic. He did not anticipate any substantive difference in bilateral Qatari-Israeli relations. He observed that while some of the top leadership in Qatar may want acceptance of Israeli presence in Qatar and the region, they had to balance these desires with internal push-pull factors and could not risk undermining their own positions given the controversial nature of this issue. And it is probably for those very reasons, suggested Segev-Steinberg, that there was no mention of Al Thani's speech and comments in the Qatari press--unlike in Israel--where the foreign minister's speech and comments were carried in the papers.

Wither the Israeli Trade Office?

4. (C) Segev-Steinberg, who has been in Doha for two years, departs at the end of September and returns to Israel for a temporary position as the head of the Asian department at the MFA. Segev-Steinberg hopes to be permanently assigned as head of the Egyptian department sometime in January of next year. According to Segev-Steinberg, the Israeli MFA is in disarray as a result of some controversial political appointments. With new regulations pending to introduce more transparency in the assignment process, many positions have yet to be assigned. Also affected is the position of Israeli trade representative to Qatar. Segev-Steinberg revealed that this position would not be permanently filled for a while due to the changes taking place at the MFA and also due to a lack of interest on the part of Israeli diplomats to come to Qatar. Rather, Israeli officers will rotate monthly to the trade office until someone is permanently assigned. The first to rotate in October will be Margalit Geva, currently director of the Gulf States Department.

On Internal Qatari Politics.....

5. (C) Commenting on internal Qatari politics,

Segev-Steinberg observed that recent pictures of the Emir's wife Sheikha Mozah in New York with a dagger -a symbol of power- at her waist were noteworthy and appeared to be sending a message of the Sheikha's increasing power. Segev-Steinberg noted that the Sheikha was also photographed similarly during a recent visit to Rome. Segev-Steinberg also weighed in on possible changes to come within the Qatari government. Segev-Steinberg opined that recent pictures showing the Emir and his daughter (with Sheikha Mozah) at UNGA may point to future changes at the MFA. The pictures were noteworthy in that the daughter, Sheikha Myassa, was at the Emir's side and often preceded the Foreign Minister, Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani. Sheikha Myassa was photographed taking notes throughout the UNGA meetings and speaking with various heads of states. Segev-Steinberg speculated that the Foreign Minister may slowly be pushed out of his position and be replaced by Sheikha Myassa.

16. (C) Should that occur, Segev-Steinberg believed that it might lead to some internal conflicts within the ruling family. The Foreign Minister is uncle to the Emir and would not readily accept this loss of power. Overall, Segev-Steinberg viewed these developments as an attempt by the Emir to "put things in place" given his ailing health and kidney problems. Further, Segev-Steinberg believed that the Emir would prefer to step down before forced to do so for health reasons. Thus, pushing his children, who support his long-term visions for Qatar into key government positions, would allow him to do so while at the same time consolidate and maintain power.

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